

As a matter of fact, George Alexander had already advanced him ;£100 before he had even sketched out the scenario of his first "society" play—Lady Windermere's Fan. When it was completed the actor, with a fine eye to business, offered to buy it outright for £1000. Wilde replied that he had such a high opinion of Alexander's judgment that nothing could induce him to accept the offer! The play was produced on 22 February, 1892, at the St. James's Theatre. It was followed by *A Woman of No Importance* (19 April, 1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (3 January, 1895)—both produced by Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre. All three plays were successful, and Wilde suddenly became the most widely discussed author of the day. His leap into popularity, coupled with the fact that he now had all the money he needed to gratify his taste for luxury, coarsened him, magnified his conceit, and gave him a king-like feeling of power, security, and prestige. He treated such friends as criticized him with coolness and an irritating superiority. His self-sufficiency cost him the company of his intellectual equals. He made no attempt to conceal his low opinion of his fellow-dramatists, and his still lower opinion of the newspaper critics. He was surrounded by a gang of sycophants and parasites, who repaid his cheques, dinners, tie-pins, and cigarette-cases with fulsome flattery and slavish homage. They also showed their appreciation of >ii» incomparable conversation by repeating his carelessly uttered *bon mots* in the presence of such victims of his wit as were most likely to be infuriated by them. Thus the actors in his plays got to hear that, in his opinion, any one could act, and that "Just as work is the curse of the drinking classes of this country, so education is the curse of the acting classes," who should not be taught to read and write but should learn their words from the lips of the poet. "George Alexander," he said on another occasion, "doesn't act on the stage: he behaves." The actors enjoyed none of these sayings and showed their lack of appreciation the moment they got the chance. It should be added that neither success nor misfortune could impair Wilde's wit, the peculiar quality of which was exemplified at about this period in his comment on a scene by Dickens: "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing." Wilde's three serio-comedies are already "dated" beyond repair. The best epigrams in them may be found in *Dorian*

*Gray*, and the forced sentiment of the dramatic passages is,